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ABSTRACT

Creative arts programing for gifted and talented elementary students has incorporated academics (ecology, mathematics, history, genealogy, computer science, and independent research) into activities such as puppetry, creative drama, storytelling, dance, music, pottery, and poetry. The arts classes have been popular with students, parents, classroom teachers, and administrators. Advantages of pottery instruction specifically, include its inexpensiveness and its attraction to both sexes and all ages. (CL)

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POTTERY INSTEAD OF SCIENCE?

One Project's Answer to the Programming Dilemma

Programming in Creative Arts

Prepared for the National Topical Conference

on the Gifted and Talented Child

Orlando, Florida

December 4, 1981

by

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What makes an ideal program for gifted/talented elementary school students? If you ask educators, they provide answers based on what they consider appropriate behaviors for gifted students. If you ask parents, their answers relate to the well-being and happiness of their child. But what happens if you ask the children themselves?

"I want to take pottery this year!"

"How can I join the pottery group?"

"Is it too late to get into pottery?"

"My mother wants to know when I can start working with pottery."

"O. K. kids, now quiet down. If you don't get pottery this year, we'll try to be sure it's on your schedule for next year."

Why is pottery so popular with gifted students? and I mean all gifted students - academically gifted, creative ability, talent in the visual and performing arts...

Because it's popular with all children. Everyone knows kids love to play with clay ...and sand...and mud...

But if it's good for all kids, <u>why is it in a program for gifted students</u>?

Just because it's so popular with children doesn't mean it's all <u>bad</u>:

You mean learning can be fun - even for gifted students?

It's been our experience that it's much easier to build creativity and task commitment with activities children enjoy. After all, "just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down."

I never thought of it that way. Learning can be fun even for gifted students. Sounds great for the kids. How did you ever come up with an idea like pottery for gifted students?

Actually, it wasn't too hard, it was already written in the Title IVC grant proposal. The real challenge was how to justify purchasing a pottery wheel and kiln for a gifted program. I mean, all other programs were purchasing computers, science equipment, math materials, research kits, creative thinking task cards...

Yes, I can see your problem. For many people pottery is just one step above basket weaving.

It did give me many sleepless nights, but once I accepted the challenge, it was just one short step to puppetry, creative drama, storytelling, modern dance, folk-singing, poetry...

So, tell us, how did you pull it off?

Well, you know in the beginning, I had no idea how popular pottery was going to be. (Actually, I'm not crazy about it myself, I lean more towards folksinging and dance.) But once I looked at pottery as a "study in spatial relationships", the rest was easy. Let's just carry it one step further and examine the two different viewpoints, students and teacher, to a typical reaction to pottery.

Students	Teacher
"I like working with my hands."	Children will develop a sense of space - what it is; how to see it; how to use it.

"It's like playing with mud."	Children will master additive, subtractive, and manipulative techniques so they have the facility with which to express their ideas.
"It's fun!"	Children will understand design as it relates to the use of three dimensional media.
"It's creative."	Children will be encouraged to invent solutions to problems, both utilitarian and non-utilitarian.

Sounds convincing. The children don't even know what they're learning. I suppose if they found out, they wouldn't like pottery any more.

There is probably a lot of truth to that statement. But, just stop and think about it. What is more challenging than a lump of clay waiting to be molded into an object of your own design? It probably has more possibilities than a Rubik cube.

Yeah, I'll bet it just blows their minds.

And you should see the creative clay pieces they design - masks, plates, baskets, beads, ornaments, animals, candle holders. When they're all glazed and fired they are so beautiful that we literally have to tear them out of the children's hands to put them on display.

Well, you've certainly convinced me that kids love to work with clay, but how do parents react when their child misses something like science for pottery?

Now you've said it, that's where it's at. <u>Pottery instead of science</u>? It almost sounds sacrilegious when

put that way. After 5 years of the program, however, there has been only one parent complaint. This parent was told that it was perfectly o.k. if her child did not attend pottery classes. (After all, there's usually a long waiting list.)

What happened?

The mother let the child make the decision - and I mean this student was the 6th grade soccer champion and science was his best subject! Of course you know the result - the student attends pottery classes regularly.

Don't students have problems with this pull-out scheduling? They must have to make up the work they miss in the regular classroom.

Of course there's bound to be some conflict of interest, and the student has to make a decision. But when it comes to pottery, you already know the answer.

I really hate to ask this question, but it always comes up when discussing gifted programming. What do regular classroom teachers have to say about arts programming?

I thought you'd never ask. As you might expect, of course, they hated it at first. That is, until we started doing things in the school and classrooms - demonstrations, storytelling, dance performances, art exhibitions, poetry readings, plays, puppet shows, folk-singing. Once teachers were convinced that the program

benefited the entire school population, they didn't mind giving up their best students.

How about the administration?

If parents are happy, and teachers are happy, and even children are happy, and learning is taking place at the same time, why shouldn't the administrators be happy. They're not hard to get along with! And actually, there are academics in the program. We have courses in ecology, math lab, colonial life, genealogy, computer science, and independent research. All areas of the regular curriculum are enriched.

Wow, you sure have come a long way with pottery.

Oh yes, once a child has worked with clay, nothing is impossible. There is a carry over into all other areas of the curriculum.

What are some of the advantages of teaching pottery to gifted students?

It's cheap! I mean $7.00 for 50 pounds of moist clay, the kids even have something to take home. Also, it's good for all ages, no problems with age groupings. And it does not discriminate because of sex, (like math or dance). Both boys and girls love it!

Boy, I sure wish they had a program like this when I was going to school.

It's never too late, just pick up a lump of clay and begin...it's even therapeutic.

You're right! I can't think of anything more challenging than a lump of clay.

Last, but not least. What advice do you have for schools interested in beginning arts programming for gifted students?

If the school already has a pottery wheel and kiln, why not consider purchasing a basket-making kit?

C.R.E.S.T. (Creative Resources Enriching Student Talents) is a Connecticut Title IVC validated program provided by the Lebanon, Connecticut, Board of Education. Supported by federal funds from Title IVC of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the State Department of Education Program for Gifted and Talented Reimbursement, the program in this community of 4,500 supports a wide variety of programs for elementary students who have academic ability, talent in the arts, and creative ability that represents a broad definition of giftedness. Special ten-week courses in art and science disciplines are provided as well as trips to museums and other resource centers. Extensive documentation of the project is on file at the U. S. Department of Education. Attn: Arts in Education Program, Room 4040, FOB 6, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW. Washington, DC 20202.

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